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BUSES AND BUSMEN.

I OUGHT to know something about buses and busmen, for I have been on the journey ever since I was the height of your walking-stick. When I was a little chap, I used to sleep among the parcels in the boot of a Paddington and City stage-coach. That was long before the buses came up. There used to be stage-coaches on all the main lines that are now worked by the buses. They were just like the old country stage-coach—they were mostly, in fact, old country stage-coaches—only, they had but a pair of horses instead of four. There is an old pattern stage-coach on the stones to this day; it comes in from Brixton Hill, and you may see it crossing London Bridge any morning. The coaches used to carry six inside and twelve outside, and the fare was sixpence between Paddington and the City. They had no conductors: the coachman managed everything along with his parcel-boy. The parcel-traffic, which used to be worth something, was a perquisite of the coachman, and he had a boy to manage it that he paid himself: eighteen-pence a week was about the figure. The boy rode in the boot along with the parcels; and sometimes he was paid by a share of the parcel-profits. The coaches were owned by private people—publicans, stable-keepers, and the like; the largest owner was a Mrs Wilson, whose family owned the 'Favorite' buses, till they were taken over by the Company. Their pace wasn't very lively; you see the roads were not so good as now, and the competition wasn't very keen. About four and a half miles an hour was about the pace, and the coaches used to stop an hour at each end of the journeys. The great head-quarters for the Paddington stage-coaches were at the *Yorkshire Stingo*; and most of the West-end coaches in these days used to stop in St Paul's Churchyard, instead of going down Cheapside to the Bank. They were well patronised, the old coaches, and several fine fortunes have been made out of them.

I remember well the first buses that came out in London. It was in August 1829—the same year that the Peelers, as the new police were called,

first came up. Shillibeer was the first bus-proprietor. He had been over in Paris, it seems, looking how they worked there, and he came back and took out a patent for them, or registered them, or something of that kind, in this country. The first buses ran between Paddington and the Bank, one bus going by the New Road, past the *Angel*, and down the City Road; the next along Oxford Street and Holborn; and so on alternately. They had three horses abreast, like the 'Red' Favorites you see now; but they were not red; in fact, they looked more like hearses than buses. They had no lettering on their sides or ends, and there was only one glass panel on either side, all the others being blank. The driver sat in the centre, just as he does now. The first conductors wore a sort of uniform of a round jacket, and cloth caps hanging over one side, like the caps some of them Belgian volunteers wear that come over every year to the Wimbledon shooting-matches. There was no perch, as there is now, for the conductor; where the perch now is was a little seat, with a high iron rail at the back side, and there the conductor used to sit. But it was found that fellows often went to sleep, and another thing was, that a good look-out all round for passengers could not be had; so the seat was done away with, and the perch substituted. In the early days there was no knife-board; no passengers were carried outside at all, except four on the box-seat beside the driver. Even the conductor was liable in a penalty if seen on the roof. At first, the enforcement of the regulations as to traffic did not rest with the street police; but that sort of business was done by informers, who made a regular trade of it, laying their information before the magistrates, and getting half the penalty if they secured a conviction. The penalties used to run pretty stiff, sometimes as high as five pounds; and the commonest offences were over-crowding, sitting on the roof, and hard driving. I know one of the old breed of informers alive, now living retired on his money: he used to keep a regular staff of men for the business, and thrive on it well. That is all changed now, and for the better, although the police every now and then do take fits of summoning

chaps right and left. The duty was pretty smart on buses in the times I am speaking of. It began at threepence-halfpenny per mile, and gradually fell to a penny, till two or three years ago the mileage rate was done away with altogether, and every bus licensed now pays two pounds as duty. I believe the revenue folks took Shillibeer into Somerset House, and found a billet there for him, because of the extent to which he had increased the revenue. The early buses were slower than the present, and didn't travel so many journeys; the Paddington ones, for instance, made only three journeys in the day instead of five: very soon—as quick as buses could be made, in fact—the coaches vanished off one line after another, till by the year '33 there was hardly an old coach to be seen. And then new lines were started, and opposition gone in for on the established lines; for trade was very keen in the old days, when there were no railways or tramways. I think there never were so many buses running in London as at the time of the first Exhibition in 1851; though perhaps there were close on as many during the second. The railways began to tell on them, however; no sooner was a new line opened than the bus-traffic suffered heavily. Perhaps there is hardly a bus-line in all London that has not had some of its vehicles knocked off within the last few years. The Metropolitan Railway pretty well did for the Old 'Express' buses, that used to run down Oxford Street to the Bank in the morning with cargoes of City men. Twenty minutes from Oxford Circus to the Bank was the time allowed, and it was wonderful how it was kept. Later in the day, such a speed as that would have been impossible. Express buses from the West End to the City have lately come up again, but on another and a clear line. Three Express 'Westminsters' run by the Embankment and Queen Victoria Street every morning, and as they have pretty well the whole track to themselves, they make good time of it. There is a four-horse Express bus on the south side; it runs from Tulse Hill every morning to the Bank, and goes along, once it is clear of the stones, in the style of the old spanking days. I could tell you about the penny 'Shakspeares' and other cheap buses, some of which went down for want of traffic, others for want of capital to keep them going till the traffic that there was had time to take to them. I think myself it would both pay and draw custom if every road were blocked into penny rides. Look what a short-distance traffic the trams have picked up already! It's not the 'all-the-way' passenger's sixpence that pays for the journey, but the quick succession of 'short-distance' smaller sums. For suburban traffic, the times look altogether bad for the buses. At the start, they have mostly a railway to compete against, and on the journey the bells of the tram-horses are tinkling front and rear of them. It will come to this in time, I expect, that we shall have trams along every main road, as near the dense centres as the trams will be allowed to come—it would be a great mistake to permit them into the crowded main streets—and we shall have buses starting where they stop, and making short connecting journeys inside what I may call the inner circle. Look what a good thing the Waterloo halfpenny bus-service has turned out! I call it a halfpenny service, although you pay a penny, because, if you crossed the bridge on foot, the tollman would take a halfpenny from you; so

the ride from the Strand to the South-western Railway only costs you a halfpenny. Suppose there was a penny line from Broad Street to the Post-office, don't you think it would pay; or another from Whitechapel, where the tram ends, to the Bank; or another from the Finsbury pavement end of the tram over to the London Bridge Station; or another from the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge to Charing Cross, or the bottom of the Haymarket? I wish I had the capital to try the spec, that's all; I wouldn't be trimming lamps in a cellar this blessed afternoon, that I tell you. I could tell you a heap of stories about the competition between 'the Company' and the private owners before the Company got nearly the full possession of the town; but if I once began, I would not know how to stop. I may tell you this, though, that no private bus was ever run fairly off the road by the Company. When the private owner meant to keep his ground, he did keep it, and does to this day; when you have seen him disappear, after what has looked like a spell of hot competition and hard struggling, it was all 'kid' on his part to force better terms of purchase, for he meant to sell from the very beginning.

When the buses first came up, the conductors used to have twenty-one shillings a week as wages, and eighteenpence a day for food besides—a shilling for dinner, and sixpence for tea. The drivers had just the same. When the competition got keen, the pay of the driver was altered to fourteen shillings a week, and the fare of one through-passenger—a 'boxer,' as he was called—each way, which was better than the higher regular wage. The conductor got no increase; it was taken for granted that he looked to himself. You see, if the Company can make a living off it now, with the rails and the trams competing with it, times must have been ever so much better for the bus interests before these competitors came up; and seeing that times were 'good,' and the money coming in, the old masters winked a bit at the 'taxation' which they knew went on, if it wasn't too barefaced. Now, a day's work will hardly stand 'taxing,' and the game has been carried so far that the Company keep their inspectors and spies continually on the move, and there are lots of checks and precautions of all kinds. It has been greatly put down, but a good bit is still done on the extreme quiet—take my word for it. The fact is, the temptation is strong, uncommon strong. I don't mean to say a man is bound to give way to it. A driver's wages now stand at forty-two shillings a week; a conductor has twenty-eight shillings, and neither have any perquisites. The driver is not so badly paid, although there are some deductions from his money before he takes it home; but the conductor on twenty-eight shillings is greatly underpaid, when you look at his hours and his work. He averages sixteen hours a day; he is out in all weathers; he never gets a chance to sit down, but hops from one perch to another, like a canary in a cage; his attention must never flag; he is always bound to be civil, and his temper is often sorely tried; he has to keep his accounts as the bus is moving; and he never gets a chance of a regular meal. It is a lucky day for him and the driver if they get ten minutes between journeys to swallow a morsel of dinner; more often they have only five, and no longer time for their tea. The old stage-coachmen mostly took to the buses, but I don't know that

there is one of them now alive; I'm sure there ain't one driving. Bus-drivers seem to thrive on the box for the most part, for they generally live to be pretty old men, and might live all the longer if it wasn't for drink. You know lots of the old mahogany-faced chaps, I don't doubt. Well, they'll tell you, if you ask them, and if they don't take the huff at the question, that their raw beef-steak complexion comes from exposure to the weather. You needn't believe them unless you like. There's lots of men as much exposed as they are to wind and weather that don't run to copper colour. The fact is, weather has something to do with it, want of exercise has something too, but drink out of sight the most. Gin and ale is the tippie for giving the real colour, believe me. I know a bus-driver who only drinks a pint and a half of malt a day. He has driven these ten years, and he ain't a bit fiery-faced. 'Rum hot'—about as favourite a drink as any with drivers—don't help to keep the blushes down. Some of them swipe uncommon hard. I knew an Islington driver who drank a quart of gin for ten years at least—half a quatern at each end every journey; and he went out like the snuff of a candle at last, dying, you may say, on the box. Bus-drivers are what you may call a very miscellaneous lot, and so are conductors. They have been all sorts of things—barmen, tailors, bakers, butchers, pot-boys, gentlemen's servants, and so forth: now and then, there is a man who is a real coachman; but most—as anybody can see who knows what driving is, and who has sat on the box of a bus—are rank duffers, with no notion of hands, no idea of helping horses by holding them together, and no conception of how to send them along without cutting into them for ever with the whip.—Bad horses? Well, the horses are no great things as regards mouth or freedom; but, mostly, it is the drivers who spoil their mouths, and then swear at them for having none. Just watch half the drivers, and notice how they rumble along, with reins hanging so slack that a horse has no sense of being in hand, and none of the confidence he gets from knowing that he is so; and then, when the bell rings, or somebody beckons on the pavement, how, with a full gripe of each hand on a rein, he takes a clumsy hawl at his horses, as if he were dragging on the mainbrace of a ship. Among busmen it is said that the worst drivers are chaps that have been gentlemen's coachmen. They give their minds altogether to their horses, and hardly ever think of touting, which calls on a man to leave nursing his horses with his eyes and look about him; and they are generally slow at pulling-up suddenly. A smart butcher, used to an outdoor trade, was the best bus-driver I ever saw; he never used a whip, never bawled at his horses or kept tek-tek-ing at them: but they knew his hands on them, and went as free as if they had been colts.

Neither drivers nor conductors, as a rule, leave bus-work when once they come to it, unless they can't help it. For, indeed, how should they better themselves? Where's your character? Nobody will look at you if you have been on a bus; the calling has got a downright bad name, and no two ways about it. I don't say whose fault it is; perhaps it is part misfortune and part fault, but there's the fact; and if you can hear of a man going up the ladder after being on a bus, all I have to say is, you'll hear of a very uncommon occurrence.

When a fellow gets the bullet from bus-work, he mostly has a spell at cab-driving, for which no character is needed; the cab-master takes too good care of himself to need to trouble about that.

On every road the drivers and conductors have a club, which has two separate purposes. There is a sick fund, into which each man pays sixpence per week; and an accident fund, into which he pays another sixpence. The latter is to meet the expenses of all fines, summonses, accidents, &c., toward which the club contributes two-thirds, and the individual one-third. Conductors are responsible for the glass in their vehicles, and when any is broken, the club helps them to meet the cost in the proportion I have stated. I don't think, on the whole, that I should like to bring a son up specially to the bus business; and if any boy were to ask my confidential advice about taking to it, I should certainly say, Don't, so long as you can do anything else.

A GOLDEN SORROW.

CHAPTER XIX.—MARKED 'IMMEDIATE.'

To drag the living man away from the dead, and into the hut, as speedily, and with as little injury to his insensible body as possible, for he was too weak to lift, and could literally only drag Walter by his arms—to lay him down within the entrance, and replace the fastenings, was Daly's first action, and then he blew a shrill blast upon a metal whistle, the concerted, well-known signal of danger and distress. He then fetched his revolver, all the chambers charged, laid it on the ground beside him, and once more resumed his efforts to bring Walter to consciousness. The interior of the lonely hut presented a strange spectacle, as Daly, ghastly with horror, and weak with recent illness, strove, all alone with his seemingly dead friend, to loosen the clenched teeth, and unclothe the stiffened hands, ignorant of whether they were surrounded by desperate enemies, and without any clue to the crime which had been committed. What had brought Spoiled Five there? Had he come thither with any evil intention, or to watch and protect them? These and innumerable other questions had presented themselves to Lawrence Daly, to remain unanswered, before he had the relief of seeing Walter's eyes unclose. At length they did so. It was only for an instant. He shut them again, with a groan and a convulsive shudder, but the life was in him. Once more Daly sounded his whistle, long and loud, and this time Walter started and writhed at the noise; struggled into a sitting posture on the floor, and stared at Lawrence, without the least recognition in his burning, glassy eyes. He groaned heavily again and again, but made no resistance while Lawrence half-led, half-dragged him to his hammock. By this time there was a stir in the valley, and men carrying torches were coming along the road towards the hut. There was security in the sound. No attack having been made before the alarm was given and acted upon, there was none to be apprehended now. The murderers had evidently decamped. Daly put

on some additional clothing, and waited, listening eagerly for the aid that was coming. The voices and the torches drew nearer, the tread of many feet came up along the stony path, past the bluff, and close to the plateau. The dawn was already spreading, and in a few more moments a crowd of eager men surrounded the hut, and were clamorously demanding particulars of the murder, which Daly was quite unable to give them, while a few were minutely examining the body.

They were a rough lot, and horrid sights, in a general way, affected them very little, but this one roused the indignant compassion and disgust of every man among them. It was such a dastardly crime to kill this maimed creature, so useful, so harmless, so familiar to them all. Every man among them knew Spoiled Five, and his preference for Daly and Clint was also well known to them. Daly could tell them no more than that the murdered man had had vague apprehensions of danger to them from some quarter which he had not indicated, and had presumably been watching the hut, without their knowledge, on this fatal night. Lawrence accounted for himself, on the occasion, thus: he had slept soundly, after parting with Walter, until awakened by a noise at first inexplicable to him. Thinking, for a moment, it must have existed only in his fancy, he listened for a repetition of it, then instantly started up, and rushed out at the back of the hut, where he saw the scene already described.

A minute search of the premises was instituted, but no clue to the perpetrators of the crime was found. While some of the party carried the murdered man into the hut, and laid him on a rough table, one of them bethought him of inspecting the dog, which had been kicked aside, and was lying against the outer wall. The man moved the poor dead brute with his foot, turning him over on his back, and then bent down and minutely examined the loop and line with which he had been choked.

'Whar wer this yer dog when you come out?' he asked Daly, who replied, that *Sambo* was close to Spoiled Five's body: they were in a heap together; he could not tell more exactly than that. The man pushed the dead dog over to the spot from which the dead man had just been removed, and taking the end of the long line, he walked away with it to the four points in succession, carefully examining the ground in each instance. On the fourth occasion, he lifted up his head with a satisfied air, and dropping the line, lounged into the hut with his hands in his pockets.

'The dog was chucked up from yonder,' said he to Daly. 'There's good hiding behind that bit of crag, and somebody's been sittin' agin the bush, and squeezed it flat. The trick's been done by a chum with a tidy notion of the meanin' of the lasso. I guessed it when I saw the loop, so well greased and taut.'

And then, thinking, probably, that he had given enough time and consideration to this matter, about which so many others were busying themselves, he lounged away.

The rude, but usually effectual forms of justice,

as practised in the state, were all complied with in this case, but without result. If a momentary suspicion lighted on Walter Clint as the possible perpetrator of the deed, it was only momentary. There was no conceivable motive; and Daly's account of the anxiety which the unfortunate man had shewn for the safety of their 'dust,' even in the modified form in which only he was aware of it, combined with the universal acquaintance with all the good and bad characters in the place which Spoiled Five was known to have, removed the crime, in one sense, from the category of mystery. A plot to rob the tenants of the isolated hut had no doubt come to his knowledge. His peculiar ideas of honour and fidelity at once hindered him from betraying, and prompted him to prevent it at the risk—as it proved, at the cost—of his life. Daly's conjectures were as endless as they were unavailing. Did the murderers know of the existence of the nugget? Had they come for that, as well as for the 'dust,' and had Spoiled Five met them, and told them their search would be vain? Had they murdered him, in revenge for having circumvented them? How much of likelihood there was in these suppositions, he could not know until Walter should be in a condition to tell him whether Spoiled Five had admitted to him more knowledge of their success than the ambiguous sentence which he had spoken to them jointly: '*Whatever yez has found, here's wishin' ye full an' plenty of them;*' until he could learn from Walter whether the murdered man had any cognizance of that morning's work in the ravine. How soon that success had lost its flavour! With what horror and bitterness it was dashed! Of how little value the gold seemed to him now—when, of the two human beings who only, out of all the swarming multitudes who peopled that vast continent, had loved him, one was a disfigured corpse, and the other was in the deadly gripe of fever. Of how little value? Of none! He loathed it! He was glad to remember that he did not know where it was, that it was put away, out of his keeping, out of his sight, in the earth again, somewhere—and that it should trouble him no more, until these calamities should be somewhat overpast.

The murderers kept their secret as securely as the earth held its treasure. They were not detected, though suspicion lighted in several directions, and much increased vigilance was enforced. Even upon that motley community, it produced a grave and unpleasant impression, that the perpetrators of so dastardly a crime should be unknown, and unpunished, in the midst of them; and the victim was daily missed among his familiar haunts. They buried him in a green and peaceful spot in the valley, already peopled with many dead, and then it was discovered that no man knew his name. Lawrence and Walter had never heard it—he had been 'Spoiled Five' by traditional usage long before they came to Placer County. A rude wooden cross marks the place of his burial, bearing the familiar name cut deeply into its transverse beam, in perfect good faith, unassociated with the smallest idea of irreverence.

There was no lack of help for Daly in the task he had now to fulfil. There was general and genuine feeling about the friends, who were getting such a strong turn of trouble, and any number of rough miners would have been available in

Walter's need. For many days, Daly had no hope that he could recover. The fever was so unlike that which had attacked himself, so much worse, more violent, more exhausting, and it had been hard for him, a stronger man than Walter, to fight with it and beat it. Had he even yet beaten it? he sometimes asked himself, when he felt the utter lassitude and depression which invaded his powers, alike of mind and body, making him despair of everything. But they told him he must expect to have these sensations for many a day to come. And they told him that Walter would recover, long before he could bring himself to hope for such a possibility, and had told him so many times while yet he refused to believe it.

It was hard to look at Walter, and think that health and vigour could ever come to him again: for some time, indeed, reason seemed to be totally extinguished. He altered so awfully in appearance, that Daly dreaded to look at him, and when he was not before his eyes, was haunted by the distorted, yellow, hollow, foolish face—the face that was not Walter's at all, but a dreadful mask fastened on his body by the fever-fiend, a mask which sometimes grinned idly, and sometimes was set in a grim despair, but never, never once, through long days and nights, looked like Walter, or ceased to be foolish and mad; for its grin of laughter and its grim lines of grief were alike motiveless and unmeaning.

Daly's mind was constantly occupied with thoughts of Florence. How was he to write the truth to her, when Walter should be gone? This was in the first days, when he was hopeless. The candid, confiding face of the young wife, when she had schooled herself to the great sacrifice of parting with her husband, rose up before his mental vision, and abode there, until he could bear it as ill as the actual sight of Walter. There was, in that look, such trust in Daly, such innocent obedience, that the remembrance of it was very painful. How should he tell her? If Walter died, what would her fate be? Daly could secure her from absolute poverty, and rescue her from her false position in Reginald Clint's house; but where should she find home and friends, if the truth were known, if the foolish project hitherto carried out by the brother and sister were overthrown? He had not been a party to Walter's plan for putting his wife under his sister's protection—he had known nothing of it until it was successfully carried out. And now, he felt that Walter's death would change the entire aspect of affairs. Mrs St Quentin, with all her affection for her brother, her generous kindness to his wife, and her fidelity to her promise, was not a free agent. He would be the young widow's only efficient friend. She should have the whole of the produce of the joint toil of himself and Walter, and he would begin over again on his own account. For many days his meditations were of this dismal kind, and it was while all the appearances were strongly against Walter's recovery, that the party who had gone down to the station with 'dust' for the bankers, returned, bringing with them a great bag of letters for the miners.

Daly's share in the excitement which such rare occasions produced was never great. He had no strong ties to England or Ireland now, and though he had made arrangements—in case of any communication being addressed to him by Mr Clibborn

—for its reaching him in the New World, he regarded such a contingency as so improbable, that its existence as a possibility excited no emotion of expectation or suspense within him. He was always anxious and interested, for Walter's sake, and on this occasion he was doubly so. Supposing Walter should recover, if not to convalescence, at least to reason, and awake up to the cares which were now obscured by his illness, it might be of infinite importance to have letters from home to soothe and divert him. So Lawrence heard of the arrival of the letter-bag with anxious hope.

He could not leave Walter, to go to the 'town;' but it was not necessary. Many a volunteer would have run down and back, even in working-hours, for letters for the lone hut, and Lawrence knew he should have them quickly, if any there were.

It was evening, and Walter, who had been restless and rambling all day, had become quieter. His wan and sunken face was not, Daly thought, so unlike its former self, as it had been in the morning. The crisis of the fever must be near, and he had, for some hours, entertained a hope, not hitherto admitted, that Walter's strength might suffice for the passing through it—and was now watching him intently. He was alone with the sick man, which rarely occurred, as, since the miserable death of Spoiled Five, their neighbours had been much more neighbourly, and one or two women even had come from a distance of several miles to offer their services. There was perfect tranquillity immediately around the hut, but from the distance came the innumerable sounds of mining life, in its play-hours, and under circumstances of unusual excitement. An occasional murmur of uneasiness, or a moan of pain from the sick man, was the only sound within the hut. The little cottage in George Lane, where he had seen Walter's wife for the first time, came back vividly to Lawrence's remembrance. He thought of her pretty young face, timid, but not weak, of her unaffected, composed manner, and of the womanly sympathy with which the simple story he had told her of his life, hitherto so wasted and disappointed, had inspired her, and a longing, stronger and greater than before, came to him, that that young life might have brightness and peace in it. It would be so cruel, so needless, he thought, that such a harmless creature should be made so miserable. He was full of heart-sickening compassion for her unconsciousness of the doom which might be impending over her.

He heard men's steps and voices, and presently was called by his name, and went out in the front of the hut. Two miners had come up, and brought some letters and a welcome batch of English newspapers. The letters, three in number, were all for Walter; one was directed in Miriam's hand, two in Florence's. The men went away in a few minutes, and Lawrence went into the hut with the letters, examining the post-marks. The latest was on one of Florence's letters, and she had written 'Immediate' on the back, with several lines dashed under the word.

'Poor child!' thought Lawrence; 'she fancies her plea of urgency would be heard out here! If she only knew that Walter cannot read the letter, now that it has come to him!'

He placed the letters carefully in the locker, and looked over the newspapers while he waited for the arrival of the woman who had undertaken

to watch by Walter for that night. But he had not read for many minutes when he threw down the paper, took out the letters, and selecting that one which was marked 'Immediate,' broke the seal, and read in the first lines:

My own WALTER—Our separation is at an end. This is to tell you that you are to come back at once.

CHAPTER XX.—MRS DIXON.

'Well, here's a letter from Mrs St Quentin at last!' said Mrs Ritchie, the housekeeper at the Firs, to a satellite housemaid, one morning towards the end of spring, when even the neighbourhood of Drington was looking beautiful, and the gloomy old house was touched by the all-pervading sunshine which its perverse construction and position could not enable it altogether to evade.

'She's took her time,' remarked the satellite, not deeply interested in the matter; 'but master don't care, seemin'ly. He wouldn't break his heart, if she did not come back. I've heard him tell her she knew no more about illness than a dog or a cat, nor, indeed, as much, for they could keep quiet when they was wanted to.'

Mrs Ritchie was not attending to these remarks. She was reading the long-expected letter, and when she came to its conclusion, she turned back to the beginning, and read it through again, before she spoke.

'Well, I'm sure!' was her first observation, awakening the curiosity of her companion, who glanced eagerly at the document. 'Well, I'm sure! What next?'

'What first? I should like to know, if you don't mind telling me,' said the satellite with impatience, barely tempered by respect.

'Mrs St Quentin ain't coming at all! And I telling her about Mr Clint, as plain as I could!'

'Why ain't she coming? Won't the old gentleman let her?'

Mrs Ritchie was too much surprised to remember her own dignity, and the impropriety of such a designation for the son-in-law of the house.

'I don't know why she is not coming; she does not tell me. She only says she cannot come; but she is sending Mrs Dixon to take care of Mr Clint.'

'Lor!'

'Yes, indeed. Well, it's their business, not mine, since I've done my duty by writing to her. Mrs Dixon will be cleverer than I take her for, if she can manage him, or mind him. It's more than her elders, and betters, *I will say*, can do.'

The satellite was still looking at the letter with greedy eyes; and Mrs Ritchie condescended so far as to read it out for her.

'I am very much obliged to you for writing to me, and distressed at the account which you send me of my father,' wrote Miriam. 'It is unfortunately out of my power to return to the Firs at present, and yet I am very unwilling that you should have the entire trouble, fatigue, and responsibility of his state of health thrown upon you. I have therefore determined to send my maid, Mrs Dixon, to England, and she will assist you in any nurse-tending which my father may require. You will remember that she is a person to be depended on, very handy in case of illness, and that my father has once or twice availed himself of her services. You will not, of course, let him know that I have sent Mrs Dixon to the Firs with this

purpose in view, as he might not like it. It will be enough that he should know that I request his permission for her to remain at his house, where she will make herself generally useful, until Mr St Quentin and I return to England. I think my father will make no objection. I depend on you to arrange all this, and am sure you will find Mrs Dixon very steady and useful. I have directed her to post this letter in London, so that you will be prepared for her arrival very shortly after it reaches you'—

'Lor!' interrupted the satellite; 'Mrs Dixon may come to-day, perhaps. Where's she to sleep?'

Mrs Ritchie had a reason of her own for not answering this question immediately. She was a shrewd and a kind-hearted woman. The first quality made her aware of the difficulty of obeying certain injunctions contained in a portion of Mrs St Quentin's letter which she had not thought proper to read aloud; and the second made her very desirous of complying with them. The other servants had not been jealous of Rose's privileges while Rose's mistress was in the house with her, to keep her almost entirely occupied with herself, and make her more of a companion than a mere lady's-maid. But Mrs Ritchie had too much experience to expect that they would be satisfied that Mrs Dixon should be treated with extra-consideration under the present circumstances. And yet, Miriam had written: 'You will, I am sure, make Mrs Dixon as comfortable as possible. She has had a good deal of trouble, I believe, in her life, and she likes to keep very much to herself, and she is not very companionable with any of the other servants here. She will be more useful if she is left entirely to herself, and has the charge of my father's rooms. I daresay it will not be any additional trouble to let her have my former rooms, until I can come, and, as you will remember, she always had her meals there.'

'She's no loss down-stairs, anyhow,' was Mrs Ritchie's reflection, 'for she's nothing but a poor, pale kill-joy of a creature, and never wants to lay her needle out of her hand, and have a bit to eat, or a spell of chat, like another. Still, they won't like it. However, that's neither here nor there: it is a great thing for me to get some one to take *him* off my hands—and they must lump it. I'm not going to offend Mrs St Quentin for their fancies and feelings.'

So, when the satellite repeated her question, Mrs Ritchie said, with an air of mature consideration: 'I think, Susan, the very best thing I can do is to give Mrs Dixon the room Mrs St Quentin slept in. She can keep all her needle-work and traps in the sitting-room, and be out of every one's way there, and not far off Mr Clint, if she really takes to looking after him, and he will let her.'

'As you please, m'm, of course,' said Susan, with an indication of sniffing; 'but I never did hear of a lady's-maid being given a best bedroom.'

'You'll hear of it now, and see it too,' said Mrs Ritchie briskly, for she had no notion of her authority being disputed; 'and, what's more, I think I shall give Mrs Dixon her meals in her own room. She has very prim ways with her, and I remember Miss Miriam telling me she had made it a point, when she went to the school to be engaged, that she was not to have her meals with men-servants. She was brought up very strict, it seems.'

'Very nonsensical, I should say,' remarked Susan with a decided sniff this time. 'Poor servants have little enough to amuse them, without making hermits of themselves.'

'That's true!' assented the housekeeper heartily; 'and if she prefers to shut herself up, I'm sure we shan't miss her—nor Robert neither. However, we shall see, when she comes. Open the shutters, Susan, and dust the rooms out, at all events. I must go and tell Mr Clint what Mrs St Quentin wishes.'

'I wonder how he'll take it?'

'I don't know, I'm sure; it depends on his rheumatism.'

'And on his temper,' muttered Susan, as she slowly ascended the stairs, and Mrs Ritchie crossed the hall towards the dining-room. 'Mrs Dixon must be a regular soft one, or uncommon fond of Mrs St Quentin, to come back here, after she had got away, without her; and to attend on that old brute. I'd see him and his daughter farther first, I know; and Robert will think the same, I'll go bail.'

Things were thus shaping themselves so as to render the fulfilment of the task which she had taken upon herself less difficult than she could have hoped or expected; while Florence was travelling towards the Firs.

Her courage had not ebbed under the trial of parting with Miriam, or the little disagreeables of her solitary journey. Mrs St Quentin had been much distressed by the necessity for Florence's travelling alone; but the latter put the consideration so completely and unaffectedly aside, as to make Miriam feel it had done discredit to the common-sense of both; and she made her see the needless risk of commenting upon it to Mr St Quentin. That gentleman had received the intelligence of Rose Dixon's intended departure with unfeigned satisfaction, and plumed himself immensely upon having carried a point quietly but firmly, which it would have been ungentlemanlike to have insisted upon vehemently. He had never been able to discover what it was that Rose Dixon helped his unexpectedly unmanageable wife to 'carry on,' nor had he been able even to make up his mind as to what it was that he suspected her of 'carrying on' with this perfidious aid; but he felt that it would be a great relief to get her out of his sight and Miriam's company. The demon of jealousy might not torture and tempt him so keenly then. At all events, it would be much easier to watch his wife, when she should have no one familiar with incidents and associations of her past life near her, to encourage her, and help to delude him. The replacing of Rose Dixon by an Italian woman, a total stranger to Miriam, should be his task: she must not speak a word of English—Miriam did not speak Italian with sufficient fluency for confidences—and this woman should be in *his* interest. Mr St Quentin relaxed his teasing vigilance towards Miriam from the hour in which she coldly announced the news to him, and the sisters-in-law had a good deal of almost unrestrained companionship during the week prior to their parting. Florence had a curiously keen perception of the state of Mr St Quentin's mind, and it filled her with apprehensions for Miriam; for she knew that Mr St Quentin's morbid jealousy would be only allayed by her departure, and would again resume its active sway over him. The time passed without

her dwelling much upon her own actual circumstances, until she found herself in the train travelling from London Bridge to Drington. A terrible sense of loneliness, dreariness, and apprehension came over her as she stood alone upon the platform where she and her husband had exchanged that dumb farewell, where his hand had so closely grasped, so reluctantly quitted hers—and the sight had seemed to be struck from her eyes as her yearning gaze lost him in the crowd.

Florence left her luggage at the Drington Station, and walked up to the Firs. A thousand emotions agitated her, a thousand fears assailed her. Inexpressible sadness was in all her thoughts of Miriam, and of the 'way of escape' she had taken, as Florence feared, so rashly. How young they both were, her sister-in-law and herself, and how friendless! Many a vision of the possibilities of the future came to Florence, before she turned in at the wide, low, green gate, with its heavy transverse bar, which swung back with a sound oddly familiar after all those months of absence, and began to discern the gloomy house in the dull plateau of unkempt grass. But not one of them prefigured, ever so faintly, that which was really to come to pass.

A great fear fell upon Florence when she stood at the door waiting for admittance, a fear which she summoned up all her strength to dispel. After all, the first deception of her position accepted as inevitable, as out of her control, she was at least doing the best she could. Walter's father should be a sacred charge and duty to her; she would endeavour so to serve and tend him, that if discovery should arise, she could plead for herself and for Walter something like a fulfilment of the filial relation on her part, even though done under false pretences. Her natural sweetness and gentleness would be pretty certain to help Florence through the complications of a difficult position, but she was not likely to be able to take them into account.

Mrs Ritchie received Mrs Dixon—she had obtained the customary brevet rank on her mistress's marriage—with civility, and invited her to tea in her own room, though she explained, to her great relief, that she was to have Mrs St Quentin's former quarters. It did not require much skill to baffle, while seeming to satisfy the curiosity of the household concerning the lately married couple. A vivid account of the glories of foreign lands, of the entertainments at which Mrs St Quentin was an admired guest, and the generally 'jolly' life she was leading, sufficed. Of course, the old gentleman was very proud of her? Of course. And so he ought to be. So he ought to be, indeed. Then it was Florence's turn to be inquisitive, and yet to keep a painful restraint upon her anxiety, lest it should pass the bounds of what she might be supposed to feel. Mrs Ritchie was ready to give her full particulars, and also ready to indulge in speculations of her own, and to cross-question the new arrival respecting the exiled son. Did Mrs Dixon know what news of Mr Walter was contained in the letter to Mrs St Quentin which she had sent on to foreign parts? And did Mrs St Quentin think her brother would return and be reconciled with his father? Mrs Dixon was in ignorance on these points, beyond the general fact, that Mr Walter was doing well out in the gold country. An awful place, Mrs Ritchie had heard, where people were murdered as often as not, and nobody ever got

hung for doing of it. She really wished Mrs Dixon had known Mr Walter, for, for her part, she never expected him to come back any more—her feelings and her dreams went against it, and she was an uncommon sharp dreamer. It was not to be denied that Mr Walter had been hardly used; and there wasn't one in Drington, as knew anything about it, who did not think so, as well as she.—He had been rather wild, had he not? Wild! Why, bless Mrs Dixon's heart, not he—only free, and natural, and high-spirited, as a young man ought to be, and more given to liking the neighbours, and being sociable with them, than to hating everybody, and making himself hateful to them, like his father. Mrs Ritchie knew no other fault of his. He was a handsome, free-handed young gentleman—not over-wise, perhaps, and nobody's enemy but his own. It was not easy to ascertain exactly what Mrs Ritchie meant by the last clause in her description, and Mrs Dixon seemed anxious to know. Well, he was not very steady, perhaps, and might be easily led, and Mrs Ritchie thought he would be the better for a friend at his elbow. She hoped he might find good friends for the time he would have to live in those dreadful foreign parts—and once more, being complacently convinced that Mrs Dixon would never now enjoy the opportunity of becoming acquainted with her mistress's brother, she lamented that she had not been at the Firs 'in his time.'

Florence did not see anything of Mr Clint on that evening. He had been rather better during the past week, and had taken Mrs Ritchie's communication of Miriam's request with an unusually good grace. He had been neither surprised nor concerned at the prolongation of Miriam's absence from England. It was her affair and St Quentin's, not his; if they liked to throw away money on living uncomfortably among dirty foreigners, he did not blame them for doing so. He did not want them; there was no love lost between them. Indeed, there had been but little of that valuable but unmarketable commodity lost between Mr Clint and any human being, in the whole course of his life.

On the morning after her arrival at the Firs, Mr Clint sent for Mrs Dixon. He wished to speak to her in the study. Florence had gained in good looks and health by her sojourn abroad, and the quiet grace of her figure and mild pathetic beauty of her face were set off by the plainness and propriety of her dress. As she stood just inside the study-door, and Mr Clint looked at her from his place by the writing-table before a distant window, he muttered almost audibly: 'By Jove, she looks like a lady!'

Her mental comment upon him was of a very different nature. Mr Clint was altered since the day of his daughter's marriage, on which Florence had last seen him, in a manner and to a degree which she immediately, and rightly, imputed to his growing propensity to drink. His handsomely cut features were swollen, his eyes were glassy and unsteady, and his figure looked shrunken and stooped. He had been ill; and pain, she knew, makes terrible havoc, but Florence did not hold rheumatism accountable for all she noticed in Reginald Clint's face and form.

He spoke to her civilly, and told her to take a seat; he wished to ask her some questions about Mrs St Quentin. She complied; and he asked her

about Miriam's health, looks, and enjoyment of foreign travel. He spoke abruptly, but without surliness, and looked at her closely, but not offensively, as she replied.

'That will do,' he said, after an interview which had lasted a quarter of an hour; 'you may go. I am glad Mrs St Quentin sent you here. You are quite welcome to remain as long as you like. I hope they make you comfortable?'

'Thank you, sir; I am perfectly comfortable.'

'What room has Mrs Ritchie put you in?'

'Mrs St Quentin's former room, sir. I have a great deal of needlework to do for my mistress, and Mrs Ritchie allows me the use of the sitting-room.'

'All right;' and Mr Clint dismissed her with a nod which was, for him, quite friendly.

In Miriam's former sitting-room there stood a piano. It was an old-fashioned, but sweet-toned instrument, and Florence had beguiled many hours in playing upon it the music which she and Walter loved. The performer had always been supposed by the servants to be Miriam, and no remarks were made. A few days after Mrs Dixon's arrival, Mr Clint summoned Mrs Ritchie to his presence, and asked her who it was whom he heard playing on the piano overhead. Mrs Ritchie told him the performer was Dixon.

'Dixon! An accomplished lady's maid, to be sure.'

'I shall tell her you don't wish it, sir,' began Mrs Ritchie.

'Tell her nothing of the sort. Who the devil told you I don't wish it? Why shouldn't the girl play the piano, if she chooses? Let her alone.'

'Very well, sir; but you seemed to think a servant'—

'Nonsense. She may have learned music, or had it in her by nature, and be none the worse servant. There; you may go.'

Mrs Ritchie was very glad to go, and she went straight to Rose Dixon, and told her what had passed. The latter was alarmed at the possible result of her imprudence. The truth was, she had forgotten the incongruity of the exercise of such an accomplishment with the station she had assumed, and she had yielded to the strong temptation of solitude and a piano.

'He was very much surprised, as was natural; but he says you're to play as much as you like—though it do seem like giving you leave to forget your place. It's wonderful that you can get so much good of him, I'm sure.'

'I—I was not always brought up to be a servant, Mrs Ritchie,' said Florence timidly; 'at one time I hoped to be a governess, and I learned music that I might teach it.'

'Ay, indeed—that explains a many things. Well, Mrs Dixon, if you had been in as many places as me, and seen as much of governesses, you would know that you have not lost so much as you may think. A servant's is a much easier life.'

'I know that,' replied Florence.

Mrs Ritchie repeated to the satellite the explanation of Mrs Dixon's out-of-rule conduct. Susan received it with a sniff, and remarked that 'edification needn't have made her so uppish.'

On the following day, when Florence was availing herself of the permission she had received, and the strains of sweet and solemn music were floating on the external air, through the open windows of

Miriam's room, Reginald Clint came round the angle of the house-wall, and stood, leaning against a post in the rough railing which kept off the grazing cattle—listening.

IN THE COUNTRY OF THE OSTRICH.

COMMANDER CHAWORTH MUSTERS, R.N., more fortunate than M. Guinnard, was not taken prisoner by the Patagonians, but went of his own free-will to live among them for a year, conforming to their ways and habits, travelling over wide tracts of untrodden ground between the Straits of Magellan and Rio Negro. He enjoyed this extraordinary experience very much, and his account of it is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of savage life in the remote and almost legendary regions of the 'land of the large-footed men.' Though the coasts of Patagonia had been explored and surveyed, the interior of the country was almost unknown. Its inhabitants, the Tehuelches, had often been communicated with, their stature noted, and their friendly disposition commended; but their real manner of life, their relations with or difference from the Pampas and Araucanian Indians, remained a mystery. On these points Mr Musters fully informs us. M. Guinnard, it is evident, did not come in contact with the true Patagonian tribes at all, but only with the Pampas Indians, who, by country, race, language, and character, are altogether distinct from the Tehuelches of Patagonia.

Mr Musters is one of a small but extremely useful class of travellers. He has lived with, he has been of, as far as such a condition of things is possible, the strange people he went to see: during his sojourn, he put all the habits of civilised life aside, and adopted the nomad habits with the costume and the manners of the tribes. He painted his face, and found that doing so completely protected him against the blistering effect of the sun and the wind; he joined in the native dances 'in full costume of ostrich-feathers and girdle of bells'; and he entered fully and spontaneously into the interests and feelings of his temporary companions, nomadic people, offering some of the strangest phenomena of human existence to be found in the savage world. The smallness of their numbers, in proportion to the great space over which these tribes wander, is one of the most striking facts pointed out. Over the whole of Patagonia, between the Straits of Magellan and the Rio Negro—a territory of over one thousand miles in length, and nowhere less than three hundred miles in breadth—there is scattered a population of about three thousand, the estimate being computed from the fighting men, who number about five hundred. They are a brave, active, efficient people, with no idle members among them, wonderful horsemen, singularly expert in the use of the weapons and implements with which they do their fighting and their sport; and they lead lives of constant wandering. The women are forced to work very hard, but they do not seem to be otherwise ill-treated; and every man,

woman, and child can ride fearlessly. Their hunting, which is of the most arduous and exciting kind, is on a grand scale, and organised with much skill; though cruel to their captives, they are decidedly friendly to individuals among the white men, and disposed to protect the civilised settlements on their coasts. Mr Musters' real experience of savage life began at the Rio Chico, where he became a member of the family of a chief named Orkeke, and took up his quarters in his toldo, by which name the temporary residences of these nomadic people are known. These toldos are very like the huts of English gypsies; and a number of them grouped together, with their innumerable dogs and fowls, and important contingent of horses, form a picturesque scene. When the tribe is about to march, the Cacique makes an oration, and then universal bustle begins. The young men and boys lazo and bring up the horses, and the women place on their backs the bolsters of reeds, tied with hide-thongs, mantles, and coloured blankets, which form their saddles; others are strapping their belts on, or putting their babies into wicker-work cradles; or rolling up the skins which form the coverings of the toldos, and placing them and the poles on the baggage-horses; last of all, the small beakers which are carried on the march are filled with water. The women mount by means of a sling round the horses' necks, and sit astride of their bolster saddles; their babies and their pet dogs are hoisted up behind them; then they take their baggage-horses in tow, and start off in single file. The men then drive the spare horses for a short distance, and having handed them over to the charge of their wives, retire to a neighbouring bush, where a fire is kindled, pipes are lighted, and the hunt commences in the following manner:

'Two men start off, and ride' at a gallop round a certain area of country, lighting fires at intervals, to mark their track. After the lapse of a few minutes, two others are despatched, and so on, until only a few are left with the Cacique. These spread themselves out in a crescent, closing in and narrowing the circle on a point where those first started have by this time arrived. The crescent rests upon a base line formed by the slowly proceeding line of women, children, and baggage-horses. The ostriches and herds of guanaco run from the advancing party, but are checked by the pointsmen, and when the circle is well-closed in, are attacked with the bolas, two men frequently chasing the same animal from different sides. The dogs also assist in the chase; but the Indians are so expert with the bolas, that unless their horses are tired, or they happen to have gambled away their bolas, the dogs are not much called into use. Puma are frequently found in the circles, and quickly despatched by a blow on the head from a ball. The Indian law of division of the game prevents all disputes.' The meat of the ostrich is highly prized, especially if the giant bird be in good condition. Owing to the entire absence of farinaceous food, the Tehuelches devour a great quantity of fat, as indeed every one must do in uncivilised countries. After the hunt, a great feast is held; a portion of the meat is reserved for the women and children, then a pipe is handed round, saddles are readjusted, and the party adjourn to the toldos, which by this time have been pitched

and arranged by the women. Unless ostriches are very scarce, or the Indians have a peculiarly strong longing for blood, they do not kill the guanaco, but its flesh is excellent. The meat of the haunches is generally cut off in thin slices, lightly salted, and dried in the sun. When thoroughly dried, it is roasted in the ashes, pounded between two stones, and mixed with ostrich or other grease; this preparation, like pemmican, is very useful for a man going a long journey, as it can be carried in a small compass, and a mere handful satisfies the appetite. The party to which Mr Musters had attached himself made their way slowly up the valley of the Rio Chico, which was still frozen over. They journeyed and hunted in the teeth of a piercing wind, and with occasional showers of snow. The valley sometimes opened out into wide grass-covered plains, dotted with incense-bushes, then rose again in huge bare ridge-and-furrow-like undulations. Occasionally there occurred patches of swampy ground with frozen lagunes, and here and there open springs, the resort of numerous water-fowl. Bare and rugged hills rose abruptly out of the plains; and frequently a high hill of basalt, assuming the appearance of a ruined castle, closed in the bends of the winding river, like the castled crags beside the Rhine. They rested in the toldos for irregular periods, and danced merrily, even madly, in one set apart for the purpose, and known as the pretty house. The dancing was not ungraceful, but was rendered grotesque by the absurd motions of the head. It was strictly confined to the men, the women being only allowed to look on. The first sight of the Cordillera was most impressive; but the way became hourly more difficult; and the fording of the river, amid blocks of ice which severely wounded both horses and riders, was a terrible task. They encamped for some days on the north bank, looking up from whence, the valley expanded a few miles up into an immense plain; and the Indians told Mr Musters, that before reaching the mountains there is a great drop or basin where the wild-horses are found. The toilsome march from that encampment to the magnificent mountains was full of interest, and rich in revelations of the beauty of nature, to which the white man only was awake. The legend of the hidden cities, analogous to that current in Chili, Peru, and Mexico, is to be traced in these chill southern wilds also; not in the gorgeous golden details of Ruy Diaz Guzman, but with a sufficient flavour of old romance. One day, while hunting, the party were startled by a loud report, as of the discharge of a cannon, and looking to the west, they saw a black cloud of smoke hanging above the peaks of the Cordillera. His companions told Mr Musters that on several occasions the Indians had observed similar columns of smoke in the same direction. On one occasion, so convinced were they that it was caused by human agency, that a party set out to endeavour to penetrate the forests, and reach the dwellings of the unknown residents, which the smoke was believed to point out. They proceeded some distance into the recesses of the mountain forests, but the extreme difficulties of travelling compelled them at last to abandon their purpose, and retrace their steps. It is most probable that both the explosion and the smoke proceeded from some unknown active volcano in the range; but the

Indians firmly believe in the existence either of an unknown tribe or of an enchanted or hidden city. The Araucanians, when met with farther north, had a story current among them of having discovered a settlement of white people, who spoke an unknown tongue, in the recesses of the mountains in the same vicinity.

It is difficult to believe that a civilised man could live so long among any savages, even of a kind so superior to one's previous notions of them as these Tehuelches undoubtedly are, without suffering from profound disgust and isolation almost amounting to despair. But nothing of the kind seems ever to have occurred to Mr Musters, who became inured even to the vermin with which the Indians, though not an exceptionally dirty race, are infested. He was entirely destitute of the simplest appliances of civilised life, and he had only half an old copy of *Elsie Venner* with him, by way of intellectual food. But the people and the country and the beautiful animals—which he must surely have been sorry to see so ruthlessly butchered—sufficed to keep him perpetually interested. The proportion of animal to human life in Patagonia is so much in favour of the former that at least starvation cannot come to the tribes, as it comes to the dwellers in the waste places of the north. The guanaco, for instance, abounds over a vast range of country, extending from Peru all down the regions east of the range of the Cordillera of the Andes, over the vast plains from Mendoza to the Strait of Magellan, and even to Tierra del Fuego. The flesh of the guanaco is excellent, something resembling mutton; the young guanaco being more like very tender veal. The guanaco is of use to the Indians in every way, reminding us of the wonderful reindeer. The skin of the adult is used to make the coverings of the toldos, and that of the young ones to make mantles for clothes; the sinews of the back furnish thread; the skin of the neck furnishes lazos or thongs for bolas and bridles; the skin of the hough supplies them with shoes or coverings for the bolas; from the thigh-bone, they cut out dice, or make a musical instrument. The guanaco was thus apostrophised by a friend of Mr Musters, as they watched a fine specimen standing on a hill above them, and uttering its shrill warning neigh: 'Ah, you are a queer animal; you have the neigh of a horse, the wool of a sheep, the neck of a camel, the feet of a deer, and the swiftness of the devil!'

The splendid birds, lords of the wilds before men crossed their path, the swift and beautiful ostriches, are more highly prized, and in some respects even more useful. A grander sight can hardly be presented by the animal world than the flight of a great herd of ostriches, as they race, with inconceivable speed, with their strong feet spurning the earth and the sand, and their brilliant watchful eyes, shaded with eyelashes like slanting rain. The Patagonian variety of the rhea, or ostrich, is smaller and of lighter colour than the American. These birds are very swift of foot, and run with their wings closed, while the other species invariably spread theirs. The wing-feathers are sold for a dollar a pound at Buenos Ayres. The neck is used as a pouch for salt or tobacco; from the sinews of the leg, thongs for bolas are constructed; the grease from the breast and back is secured in bags formed of the skin; the meat is more nourishing than that of any other animal in

the country; and the eggs form a staple commodity of food during the months of September, October, and November. The male bird is swifter than the female. When any danger appears, he will feign to be hurt, in order to attract the attention of the hunter from his brood. Their usual food consists of short grass and the seeds of various shrubs. They possess great power of sight. If met or obstructed by horsemen in their line of flight, they not unfrequently squat so closely that they can scarcely be distinguished from the surrounding rocks, as the grayish colour of their plumage so closely resembles the almost universal aspect of the Pampas of Patagonia. They are not web-footed, but they can swim sufficiently well to pass a river. In the winter season, the Indians frequently drive them into the water, where, their legs getting numbed with cold, they are drifted to the shore by the current, and easily captured. In snowy weather they are also readily taken, as their eyes appear to be affected by the glare of the white snow, and their saturated plumage becomes heavier. Contrary to the usual rule among birds, the male sits on the eggs, and when the chickens are hatched, assumes the charge of the brood.

Among the mountains, grand wild-cattle abound, and Mr Musters can boast of having seen bull-fights in earnest, and where there was fair-play. He dispels the current notion of the great height of the natives of Patagonia. They are merely well-grown men, whose average height is five feet ten inches. They are athletic and active, and are always small eaters; they also have a great capacity, on occasion, for going without food for long periods. They are good-looking, with very bright eyes, thin noses, and universally good teeth. The complexion of the men is reddish brown, and they wear no beard, whiskers, or moustache, and even eradicate their eyebrows. The men have long flowing hair, of which they take great care, making their wives brush it out once a day at least. The young women are good-looking and well conducted, and young and old wonderfully industrious. Their dress, chiefly of furs, is handsome; and the women beautifully embroider and ornament the dressed skins, of which the mantles are made. They have few traditions, and their songs are merely melodious sounds, without meaning. Horse-racing and gambling are their favourite pursuits, and they have many games of manual dexterity. Marriages are always of inclination, and the only ceremony is an exchange of gifts and a great slaughter of mares. On the death of a Tehuelche, all his horses, dogs, and other animals are killed; his ponchos, ornaments, bolas, and other personal belongings are placed in a heap and burned, the widow and other womankind keeping up a dismal wailing. The meat of the horses is distributed among the relations on both sides; and the widow, who cuts her hair short, and assumes black paint, repairs to the *toldo* of her relations, or, if she has none in the party, to the *toldo* of the chief. Their religion is very vague. They believe in a Good Spirit, but have no idols or objects of worship, nor is there any trace among them of adoration of the sun. On the whole, this curious nomadic people are interesting and estimable, and Commander Musters gives them a good character for fair dealing; he concludes his most interesting narrative with the following advice to future travellers in Patagonia: 'Never shew distrust of the Indians; be

as free with your goods and chattels as they are to each other, and don't give yourself airs of superiority, as they do not understand it—unless you can prove yourself better in some distinct way.'

A COUNTING-HOUSE ROMANCE.

IN NINE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER III.

TIME had moved on with his varied and uncertain pace; so slow to-day, so swift and vanishing to-morrow; so tardy to these, so fleeting to those; and at last the summer had passed its prime, and August had come. Those of Perrow and Son's establishment who could be spared, chose this time for their annual holidays; and those who could not leave, took such compensation as was afforded by a pull on Saturday afternoons to Kew or Richmond.

Among these excursionists was not Mr Vann; once or twice, as a matter of form or civility, he had been asked to join a 'Dolphin,' or 'Neptune,' or 'Arion,' or some such high-titled club; but had he returned any answer but the negative he did return, he might have given more surprise than pleasure. But, on a particular Saturday, the clerk was so attired as to convince any one who knew his ordinary habits—in both senses of the word—that he was bent on some errand which demanded more care in his apparel, than did the aimless lounge from street to street, which constituted nearly all his outdoor pleasure.

The cause of this unusual display was as follows: by dint of extreme civility to Mr Capelmann, making him a present now and then of a sample of choice cigars, listening attentively to his complaints of the badness of trade, and the difficulty of getting in his money, Vann had become a kind of recognised acquaintance, who was on a different footing to the ordinary customer. On one particular evening, Vann went for his cottage-leaf, and while serving him, the baker eyed him somewhat attentively, but without speaking; neither did Bessy, who was writing at the desk close by, look up or speak. This rather unusual behaviour appeared to the clerk as wearing an ominous aspect, so that he began to wonder whether he had, in some unconscious manner, betrayed his secret, and given such offence that he was now about to hear his dismissal from the premises. But he was entirely wrong in this, the truth being, that Mr Capelmann was noting the much improved character of Vann's attire, and thinking he saw his way out of a difficulty. 'Mr Vann,' at last said the baker, 'I hope I shall not give any offence in what I am going to say' (his customer blushed a guilty dye even through his sallow complexion); 'but if you wouldn't mind, I should take it as a great kindness if you would do me a bit of a favour to-morrow.'

'Anything in the world, sir,' said Vann, feeling as though suddenly respite from the gibbet.

His emphasis surprised the baker, who continued: 'Well, that's uncommonly kind of you, Mr Vann; but I hope I shan't be imposing on your good-nature. My girl there, Bessy'—here the young lady lifted her head, and Vann bowed at this, the first formal introduction—'has got an invitation to a picnic, or something of that sort, out Finchley way. She is to meet her friends at Hampstead; and as her sister is stopping with them, why, Bessy has promised to take over a lot

of things for her—crinolines, I daresay, if the truth was known.' Here the baker stopped to laugh, and Bessy uttered reprovingly: 'Lor! father, how you do go on.' 'Anyhow, Mr Vann,' resumed the baker, sobering his tone, 'she has to take a 'bus and two railways, which is very awkward for a young girl by herself, you know. I was a-going to see her there, but how I am to get away from the business on a Saturday, I can't tell; I don't know how I came to promise *she* should go. Now, if you wouldn't mind seeing her as far as Hampstead—I know,' he continued, becoming apologetic in his tone, 'I know it isn't much in your way cutting about with a giddy bit of a girl; but just for once—I should really be obliged to you, and should take it as a great favour.'

Vann would have given a month's salary to have been able to make a good reply here, but halt and slow of speech, he only stammered out a few unintelligible syllables.

'Don't put yourself out for us,' said the baker, deeming his customer reluctant to undertake the charge; 'I only named it in case you might be at leisure, seeing it is Saturday afternoon.'

'I am afraid we are troubling Mr Vann too much,' said the meek voice of Bessy; and there was, to the clerk, a deep pathos in the disappointed tone in which she spoke; he stole one glance at her, and found her soft blue eyes fixed upon him with a reproachful look, which thrilled through him.

'I shall be delighted, sir; it will be the proudest moment of my life'—he began thus, but struck by the resemblance of his words to the speech commonly made after a man's health has been drunk, he abruptly changed the key. 'Would you prefer my driving her over in a trap?' he asked. 'I can have a very good one from a friend.' Vann had no friend who could lend him a vehicle but the first livery-stable keeper he might find; nevertheless, the offer sounded well, and Bessy, clasping her hands, exclaimed: 'Oh, that would be so nice!' but the graver parent objected, and as he was a man accustomed to have his own way, the driving to Hampstead was shelved. But the offer had made an impression even on him, and suddenly remarking that he was about to have a little drop of cold gin-and-water in the back parlour, invited Vann to join him.

This, then, was how Vann came to be dressed in so unexceptionable a style, and this is why he presented himself at the baker's on the Saturday afternoon; he wondered, secretly, where the young suitor was, and a faint hope crept into his mind that he and Bessy had quarrelled for ever. He caught a glimpse of the latter, attired in such voluminous skirts as at the very first suggested impossibilities in the way of entering an omnibus; with flowery bonnet, and lace, and cuffs, and brown curls—he caught a glimpse of her while being smoothed down, as one may say, by her mother, in the back parlour; and then she came out radiant and smiling, with a beautiful white parasol, and gloves of some delicate colour upon her plump little hands. And there, too, were the parcels: they were a nuisance certainly, but had it not been for them, as Vann mentally consoled himself by saying, why, he would not have been wanted at all! Mrs Capelmann, who was quite as handsome, and nearly as blooming as Bessy herself, gave her daughter many injunctions, and Vann a few; then,

when the omnibus came by, Bessy, by some ingenious device, got in, the boxes were placed on the roof, and they went off.

There was no opportunity for conversation in the crowded vehicle, but, luckily, that ride did not last long, and when they got into the train, fate was propitious, and the carriage was empty. Bessy had quite enough to do, it seemed, in adjusting her cuffs, and opening and shutting a small bag which was under her personal charge; but Vann, who had no such resources, felt himself looking very foolish, and perhaps sullen. He made several efforts to speak, but his tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth; at last he said, after trying in vain to remember any one of half-a-dozen openings which he had arranged in the morning, as being suitable: 'It is very pleasant to-day.'

'O yes! Mr Vann,' assented the young lady; 'it is so nice! It is quite like the country already. I do so love railway travelling, you know; but I am quite ashamed to think what trouble we have given you.'

'Trouble! O dear, no, Miss Capelmann; nothing of the kind. I should not have been doing anything else,' said the unlucky Vann, and then he turned red-hot all over, to think what dreadfully clumsy speeches he was making.

'Oh, I am so glad to know that,' exclaimed Miss Bessy again; 'but really, Mr Vann, it is very kind of you.'

Although Bessy's smiling face and pleasant manner might have encouraged the most timid of swains, Vann was unable to improve the opportunity, and here the conversation dropped, until he announced that they had to change carriages at the next station. This was done; the boxes were gathered in a cluster on the platform; the new train drew up, and away they went for another short ride. This time they had company, and, of course, Vann was unable to get out a syllable, which was the more galling, as he had brought a bouquet of rare flowers with him to present to Miss Bessy, and he felt now that he really could, if the chance would only present itself again, speak coherently and clearly. What made matters more annoying was that an elderly stout man, a man who had a club-foot too, sat opposite, and he got into quite an animated conversation with Bessy; and although it was clear to Vann, from the commonplace things he said, that he had not two ideas in his head, his discourse seemed to interest the young lady. But the worst of all was, that once or twice she looked half-poutingly, half-sorrowfully at Vann, as though she feared she had offended him.

At length they reached their destination. Bessy sprang lightly from the carriage to the platform, and the man with the club-foot handed out her parcels. Vann could not get out of the carriage until the man sat down again, and this vexed him anew, for it made him appear lukewarm in Bessy's service. Another moment, and they were outside the station, just in time to see a wagonette draw up, from which—more resplendent in attire even than Vann—leaped the unwelcome form of the ironmonger's son. He kissed Miss Capelmann without the slightest show of hesitation on either side, and a chorus of welcome arose from the crowded vehicle, Vann's unexpected presence, however, occasioning many a glance of wonderment.

Seeing this, Bessy introduced him to the young ironmonger, who raised his hat with the air of a young baron, and, in most courtly phrase, begged to be allowed to join his thanks to Miss Capelmann's for the very great kindness Mr Vann had shewn. The wagonette was full, he regretted to say; but as the picnic would be held at no great distance, in the copse at the back of the *Moon and Stars*, why, if Mr Vann would join them, and accept a seat, he—the young ironmonger—would have great pleasure in walking thither. Of course the clerk would not entertain this offer; and as he was conscious that the party must be impatient to depart, he introduced his bouquet, which he said a friend had given him on hearing the picnic mentioned. 'O my! Oh, thank you!' ejaculated Miss Bessy; 'I am so much obliged, Mr Vann.—There, Edward! did you ever see such flowers?—Oh, thank you so much, Mr Vann. I am so sorry you can't come with us.' Here, with a spring, and the help of the ironmonger's stalwart arm, she was placed in the wagonette. The gentlemen lifted their hats, the ladies kissed their hands, and the horses started off at a pace which soon took the vehicle beyond the ken of the lonely clerk, standing under the wooden piazza of the little station, and gazing dolefully in the direction in which it had vanished.

His fixed gaze, or his rueful countenance, told more to the outer world than he could have wished, for Mrs Narrowby, Bessy's sister, and the only married lady of the party, observed, in an under-tone to Bessy, when her lover's attention was engaged: 'Well, my dear, it is pretty plain that you have two strings to *your* bow.'

'Lor! nonsense, Matilda! Whatever do you mean?' returned Bessy in the same key, blushing crimson nevertheless.

'Oh, you know well enough,' retorted her sister: 'there's no harm in it; only, I shouldn't have brought him to meet Edward.'

This, then, was the impression which Vann produced on the wagonette party. As for the clerk himself, he turned from the station, and strolled slowly and thoughtfully through a number of pleasant thoroughfares, where the houses lay in gardens, and where there were more trees and shrubs than bricks and mortar, until he reached a large lawn, which was evidently common to the tenants of some twenty or so handsome houses; these communicating with it by gently sloping banks of turf, which reached to their windows on the ground floor. Although the houses and gardens were comparatively new, yet a few old trees, which had been there when the place was first laid out, relieved the bare look such spots usually wear, and some quickly growing shrubs had risen to a height which gave privacy to the enclosure. At the gate Vann stopped, half unconsciously, to watch a party of children at play—some eight or ten little boys and girls, under the care of several particularly smart servants, were chasing a large ball, while their parents and friends sauntered up and down the sward, or lounged under the shade of the trees. At that moment, one urchin, flinging the ball with unusual vigour, threw it over the head of the nearest servant, and over the gate also, close by where the clerk was standing. He instinctively turned to follow it, but, as he did so, a voice which seemed unaccountably familiar said: 'Be kind enough to throw in that ball, sir.' He picked it

up, and tossed it to the speaker, who had come to the gate. Their eyes met, and he recognised his master, Mr Ambrose Perrow.

'Why,' exclaimed the latter, who seemed the more astonished of the twain—'why, it is Vann! I am much obliged to you, and—By-the-bye, Laura,' he continued, turning suddenly to a tall lady who had come up, 'here is one of our clerks, a man whom we can trust.—Come in, Vann.' So saying, he unlocked the gate, and the clerk stepped within the enclosure.

'Can you go for me into the City, Vann?' asked his master. Vann replied that he could do so. 'Thank you,' said Mr Perrow.—'Then, Laura, this will do very nicely. Come this way.' They led the clerk to a small arbour, where Mrs Perrow seated herself on a chair, which commanded a view of the children at play, and only turned her head now and then when addressed by her husband; of his clerk, she had not taken the slightest notice, and seemed scarcely to be aware of his presence. 'We want you,' resumed Mr Perrow, 'to go to Mr Annett, the house-agent in Cheapside, and if you do not find him there, to ascertain his private address, and go on. We have altered our minds somewhat suddenly, and have decided upon taking a house which he has to let, at Brighton; but if he does not receive our decision this afternoon, it will probably be gone. Here is a ten-pound note, give it him, and say—Or perhaps we had better write, Laura!'

'Yes,' said the lady, very coldly, and only partially turning round; 'yes, I think you should write.'

'We must go into the house, then,' said Mr Perrow, 'for I have neither pencil nor paper here.' His clerk had both; and after a brief consultation with his wife, Mr Perrow wrote a few lines. Vann in his turn had been gazing at the children, and not having observed that his employer had finished writing, the latter rose to give him the note, but recoiled as he moved for the purpose, with an exclamation so deep and harsh in tone, that his wife and clerk each looked round in alarm.

'Good Heavens! Ambrose, what is the matter?' exclaimed Mrs Perrow, rising; 'you are as pale as death! What is the matter?'

'Oh, nothing! it is past now,' said Mr Perrow, with a faint laugh, passing his hand across his face, which was indeed deathly pale. 'I had a sudden—a kind of spasm; however, it is over.—There is the note, Mr Vann, and here is the money.' He kept his eyes with a strange, searching expression on the clerk's face for a moment, but it died away, and he muttered something in a tone of vexation. Vann took the letter and money, and left.

Mrs Perrow turned to her husband, and said: 'That, then, is your confidential clerk? I don't like him.'

'Neither do I, I must own,' returned her husband.

'I can see you do not,' continued the lady; 'but I can see also that he is not to be trusted, so don't trust him, Ambrose.'

'There, I venture to think, you are wrong,' said Mr Perrow, with a laugh; 'he is not, I admit, a likeable person, but he has a first-rate character for prudence and integrity.'

'I never pay any attention to given characters, in judging what a man will do,' argued his handsome wife; 'but here comes Jane with Master Ambrose. He is tired, I suppose.'

CHAPTER IV.

'You are to go into Mr Perrow's room, if you please.' This was the message delivered by an office-boy to Vann, and of course obeyed. The old gentleman was, as usual, by himself: just now, indeed, the second member of the firm was away at the sea-side.

'A—ah—let me see,' said the merchant, as the clerk entered and made his silent bow. He felt among his papers, as if seeking something he had mislaid. 'Let me see; what did I want you for to-day? Oh, to be sure. You will be good enough to go to Greenwich and pay Mrs White the same amount as before. I have Macbennoe's cheque somewhere—here it is;' and he produced it, not from among his papers on the table, but from his pocket-book. Vann noticed this, and decided at once that his employer had only made a feint of seeming to have mislaid it, and wondered what reason he could have for such careful show of how trivial the matter was to him. 'You will get the receipt,' continued the merchant; 'and it would be more satisfactory perhaps to the firm if you saw her, and so were able to say you knew she was alive. But there is no fear of her decease; these annuitants live for ever.' Laughing at his own pleasantry, as he had done before, when speaking of the same transaction, Mr Perrow handed the cheque to Vann, who withdrew as quietly as he had entered.

It was a very different season to that in which he had paid his previous visit to Greenwich; for then it was on a dull damp day at the close of February, and now a brilliant sun lighted up and made glorious the parks and the river, and even the grimy warehouses and wharfs on the banks. He passed, although it did not lie in his way, the baker's shop, and looked in, hoping to see Mr Capelmann, but was disappointed. It was the hour at which the baker was usually there, but he was not to be seen. Bessy being absent also, Vann took courage to inquire after her father, and was informed that he was away on business for the day; 'but,' added the attendant, 'Miss Bessy will be down in a few minutes.' The clerk, as was his habit on such occasions, mumbled out something unintelligible, and went on.

Bright though the day was, and cheerful as the sail by the steamboat ought to have been, Vann was in no mood to be light-hearted or cheerful. The last sovereign he had in the world had been 'put on' Caspar for the St Leger, and the morning paper had told him that the horse had fallen hopelessly lame, and was 'scratched.' He had backed the horse at long odds, and watched it creep up in the betting, until it had become second favourite, refusing to hedge, in the belief that it would become a greater favourite still, and now it was struck out! He was as poor as ever; poorer, perhaps, than when first known to the reader, for luck had been dead against him, while he had speculated heavily, and on the strength of his ready money, had obtained credit with several tradesmen, who a little while before would probably have refused him. He had promised settlement with all of them in June, having a presentiment that his horse would win; and thus it was realised! In the disconsolate mood induced by such reflections as these, he arrived at Green-

wich, and reached the quiet street where Mrs White dwelt. In answer to his inquiry, he found that Mrs White was at home, and would see him directly.

'You must please excuse me taking of you into the back-room, sir,' continued the servant, 'because missis's landlord is in the front parlour.'

Vann, making no objection to this arrangement, sat down in the room, which, from the character of its furniture, was evidently used as a sort of kitchen. 'Her landlord—um: he can't have come for the rent,' thought Vann, 'unless she appoints this day to pay it for the past half-year, speculating on the Liverpool people always sending it to the hour. If so, she will be here to ask for it before he goes.' But this conjecture seemed to be wrong, for after waiting some little time, he heard footsteps in the passage, the street door opened and shut, and a vehicle was heard to drive away. Vann remembered that he had seen a boy tending a pony-chaise not far off when he came in. Then the servant reappeared, and said: 'Oh, please will you come into the front-parlour now, sir?' He rose and followed the girl, who left him at the door of the room indicated, and without going through the form of mentioning his name, went down-stairs. The little room was comfortably enough furnished, and a table standing under the window was covered with flower-pots, filled with large geraniums, their leaves darkening and making cool the apartment; and in their shade, with her back to the dimmed light, sat a woman in black. She rose as he entered, and each of their lips moved as though they were about to speak, but, in lieu of speaking, a wild terrified expression came on their faces, and each instinctively clutched at the nearest chair for support. He knew her quickly enough—the shade and obscurity of the room mattered not—he knew her as soon as she knew him. They were brother and sister.

'Harriet!' exclaimed Vann, who was the first to speak, 'it is you! I cannot hope that I am mistaken. What disgrace are you hiding under this masquerade?'

'Tis well you should speak to me like this,' said the woman, in a cold stern tone—'very well. You recall to me how great a villain I once owned as a brother. The lapse of years, with a great deal of hardship and injustice, combined for the moment to make me feel almost like a sister to you. It is well you spoke as you did.'

'I spoke hastily, Harriet,' said Vann, 'and I was wrong. I make no professions of affection; they would not be sincere if I did, and you would not believe them if they were sincere. But that I may know what is best to be done for myself, possibly for both of us, tell me, if it suits you, how I find you here under the name you bear.'

'I have borne many names since I saw you last,' answered the woman, 'and my story is a long one. I have no objection to tell you all that you can need to know; but my history is a long, and perhaps a dull one, and you were not noted for taking an interest in the troubles of others.'

'Nor am I now,' said Vann bluntly; 'but holding the position I do—and I, on my part, am ready to give explanations—I think it very likely that I shall find it to my interest to know something. Will that satisfy you?'

'Yes,' said the woman, curtly—'yes, that will; better than anything else you could say. First,

let me ask if it was you who came last time—for I was told it was a stranger—to pay the money from Macbennoe's?

'Yes,' said Vann.

'Then, although I will hear your account directly, I can pretty nearly understand your position,' she said. 'Now for my own story. I ran away from home—that you know; and that I ran away with Mr Malton, the stranger who was so constantly waylaying my path, you must have guessed. But you did not know that I was married to him.'

'Married!' exclaimed Vann, opening his eyes in amazement.

'That I was married to him,' repeated the woman. 'You are going to ask why I did not tell you, and thus save all anxiety and discord. I will tell you now, if you do not guess already. Had you ever shewn the faintest sign of a brotherly kindness, or wish to protect me, I should have taken you at any rate into my confidence. Had you done anything to shew yourself worthy of succeeding my father in keeping our home happy, I would not have seemed to disgrace you; but you know what your conduct was, and I was glad to think that I could mortify you. I was married at a registrar's office in Manchester, and lived with my husband for three years; but we soon found that we were an ill-matched pair. I will not tell you much of our life; you would give me no sympathy—possibly I deserved none—and you want facts. He neglected me, and I took to drinking; I became then, and have ever since remained, addicted to drinking in excess.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said Vann.

'I know you are; I was certain you would at any rate say so,' retorted his sister. 'You have every vice which can debase a man, save that; and I know that you, like many others, consider that the absence of a taste for drink entitles you not only to despise those who have this weakness, but to indulge in your own favourite sins. Well, we quarrelled almost incessantly, and I soon found I was not his wife.'

'How do you mean?' interrupted Vann.

'Why, he pretty plainly told me that his name was not Malton, and that he could shake me off when he pleased,' said his sister. 'We seldom stopped long in a place, and I could not understand how he got the money to live at all: excepting that he never went to London, where, he hinted, it would not be safe to shew himself, it seemed of no consequence where he lived. At last—we were then at Bristol—we had a more desperate quarrel than usual; he struck me, and I tried to stab him. He caught the knife, but I struck with such force (for I meant mischief) that I maimed him for life. I cut one of his fingers through, so that he lost it.'

'Stop there, for a moment,' said Vann, suddenly rising and coming close to her. 'Which hand was it that you cut?'

'Why, Dick,' exclaimed the woman, 'are you going to faint? What can it matter to you?'

'Which hand, Harriet, I say?' repeated her brother, whose white face and husky voice spoke of an emotion inexplicable to the other.

'The left hand, if you must know,' she said. Her brother muttered 'Of course,' but allowed her to proceed. 'We parted about a week after this, for good and all; I may say he deserted me, and I never saw him again. The firm at Liverpool—

Macbennoe's, I mean—sent a man to me to say that an allowance of sixty pounds a year would be paid to me for life, on condition of my never making any effort to find my husband, whose name, they admitted, was feigned. He had gone abroad, they told me; and after a year or two, they offered me two hundred pounds down and a continuance of my pension, if I would go abroad also; but by this time other things had arisen, and I did not choose to go.'

'What sort of man was Malton? Was he tall or short?' asked Vann.

'He was a tall, swaggering man,' said Mrs White, 'with very strongly marked features; large eyes, and rather short-sighted; with crisp, curly-brown hair.'

'Did you know his name was not Malton, when you married him?' asked the clerk.

'No; I always called him and believed his name to be Alfred Malton,' was the answer.

'You never,' continued Vann, after a little pause, 'heard from Macbennoe's what his name really was, did you?—No, I thought not. And when did our old clerk, Mr Lambell, first begin to pay the annuity?'

'He always paid it,' said his sister.

'What!' exclaimed Vann, 'Mr Lambell has always paid you! Why, did you always live here?'

'No; I lived in many places, all over the country,' replied the woman.

'Then did not Macbennoe's clerk ever come?' pursued Vann; 'and were you always paid in their cheque?'

'Always in their cheque,' said Mrs White; 'and I never saw any clerk but Mr Lambell. He used to come wherever I lived, if it was a hundred miles away, and—luckily for me—never asked any questions.'

'Well, it's odd, certainly, but only their way, I suppose,' said Vann coolly. Then rising, he added: 'I will take your receipt, Harriet, and then I must go. I shall call in again before this day six months, I hope.'

The woman signed the receipt; Vann gave her the cheque, and was about to leave, when, with the unpleasant smile which was so familiar to her face, she stepped quickly before him to the door, locked it, and quietly put the key in her pocket.

'How now? What freak is this?' exclaimed the clerk.

'No freak, Dick, but pure policy,' said his sister, with the same harsh smile. 'Sit down. Do you suppose that I am such a child as not to know that you have some purpose in all these questions? Don't you think that I must have suspected for years that there was something mysterious in the manner in which I have been paid my annuity? And can I not see that you, being able to put what I know—and which I have told you freely, because I saw what was passing in your mind—and what you know together, fancy you hold the key? Come, we must work in concert, if we work at all. What is it?'

'What is it, Harriet? I know nothing, never did know anything, about you or your affairs,' retorted Vann.

'Cease this fooling, for which we are both too old and too experienced, and if I can ever do you any good, I will, depend upon me. You don't know anything! Perhaps not; but you have a strong

suspicion that you can find my husband. Aha! you change colour at that, do you? Tell me who it is, Dick, and what you think of doing. It is of no use seeking to evade me, for you shall never make a shilling out of my history unless sumpence of it falls to me. Who is it?' "

'Nonsense—you are crazed,' said Vann; but a quaver in his voice shewed that he was speaking under a disadvantage. 'You are crazed, and imagine things which have no existence. I don't know, and don't want to know, your husband. Will you open the door, or am I to stay here until evening?'

'No; you shall not stay here ten minutes longer!' returned his sister. 'I am determined you shall hear what I have to say, and shall say what you choose in reply, which will be as near or as far from the truth as you may think convenient. But understand this, Dick: you are only a sneaking traitor, and have not head or heart for a good bold dash; now I have. Although you are quick enough at putting small evidence together, and so worming out secrets, you could never divine what I could, or dare act as I will. I know that your power to work out your plan, whatever it is, must be based upon your position at Perrow and Son's, and although I should like to make the man pay who deceived me, yet I would rather he should escape than that he should pay you only. I hate you both, but hate him the least.'

'Savage! devil!' muttered Vann.

'Yes, I know all that,' she replied. 'Listen! I will checkmate you. I don't know what harm I may do to others, but I am sure I shall ruin and foil you if I go straight to Perrow and Son, and tell them all I know, and all I suspect about you and your plans; about your past and your intended future. This I will do to-morrow—I will, by Heaven! I cannot hurt myself, for if it was not somebody's interest to keep me quiet, I should not have had this money all these years. Now, go as you like.'

'Idiot! you don't know what you are saying,' exclaimed the clerk. 'Leave all to me; it will be the better for you.'

'Every one who knows you knows you are not to be trusted,' coolly continued his sister; 'every one knows I am, so far as keeping my word is concerned. I repeat, and I swear, that I will be at your office to-morrow by twelve o'clock if you don't tell me all, or if I don't feel certain that you have told me all. Now, you can go or stay.'

So saying, she unlocked the door, and threw it wide open. Vann gazed at her for a moment with a look of the bitterest hatred, as though he would have struck her to the ground; but there was an expression in the eye of the woman which his lacked, for meet where they might, she would always be the master-spirit.

'Have it your own way, then,' said he at length; 'it will make no difference in the end, I suppose. You were married to a man whose name was not that in which the ceremony was performed. As you were not a party to the deceit, the marriage is just as binding as though he had used his right name. He can be punished; but the ceremony is valid; and if he married again during your lifetime, he would commit bigamy. I believe I know the man; I believe your husband has married again. The man I suspect is Mr Ambrose Perrow, the junior partner in our firm; and if my suspicions be true,

Harriet, not all California contains so rich a gold mine as Perrow and Son's office shall be to us.'

Then he told her his reason for suspicion, and shewed, with ready cunning, how it could easily have arisen that, at the time the pair separated, Mr Perrow had found it convenient to consult the Liverpool firm, and how the latter had willingly concealed his identity, and professed to assist his deserted wife on behalf of a client of their own. Lambell had been selected to pay the annuity, partly on account of his known fidelity, and partly because the Perrows would feel anxious to know where she was; while the very simple expedient of paying her by a Liverpool cheque, gave such an air of verity to Macbennoe's account of the matter, that the woman's suspicions never for a moment turned to the London firm. Had she ever thought of seeking her husband, for which, however, she owned she had no inclination, she would have inquired in Liverpool and Manchester, and certainly not in the metropolis. Vann explained that he should first find his betting friend, and induce him to be more communicative; then, when he had heard all he could tell, would contrive some way for his sister to see Mr Perrow, and then—for he had not the slightest doubt of the result—he would 'work' the firm. So enthusiastic did he grow under the influence of these visions, that he wrung his sister's hand heartily when he left, and hesitated for a moment as though he meant to kiss her. She did not shew a kindred enthusiasm, although she did not check him; while willing enough to assist in spoiling the Egyptians, the prospect of the plunder elated her less than it did her usually impassive brother.

A SONG OF MARCH.

THE Morning streams on sparkling floods,
On gardens, lawns, and joyous woods;
The dew-sprayed beams of gables old
Shine as if turned to solid gold;
In stars along the terrace-ways
The snowdrop white and crocus blaze;
The quick light glints in poplar ranks,
On park-wood pales and violet-banks;
The lane is touched with richer brown,
The eager flock is running down;
Gray ash and elm the sunshine mark
With branchlike shadows sharp and dark;
Now here and there a primrose bright
In sunny yellow greets the light,
And gaily all the air is stirred
By coo of dove and chirping bird;
Now pours the old remembered note
From lark and throstle's speckled throat;
For Earth has burst her icy chains,
And freed her hair from winter rains,
And decks with smiles her winsome face,
And laughs divine in every place,
Singing of victory over Death,
Scenting the air with sweetest breath,
While under Heaven's triumphal arch
In glory move the hosts of March.

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